

# **MINUTES OF THE HATTIESBURG TOURISM COMMISSION BOARD MEMBERS & MANAGEMENT**

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Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, was held at the Hattiesburg Train Depot on:

**April 27, 2022**

Be it remembered that on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of April, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in person at the Hattiesburg Train Depot Community Room. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

**PRESENT**

Frank James  
Melanie Archer  
Michael Marks  
Shawn Lowrey  
Anthony Harris  
Dr. Joe Paul  
Bonnie Warren

**ABSENT**

**ALSO PRESENT**

Marlo Dorsey, Management  
Kristen Brock, Staff  
David Ott, Counsel

Paige Robertson, Staff  
Meagan Duckworth, Staff

**Citizens Forum**

With no public guests present, citizens forum was not held.

**Minutes from Previous Board Meetings**

After full review and upon motion by Anthony Harris, duly seconded by Melanie Archer, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve February 2022 meeting minutes.

Counsel David Ott presented Executive Session minutes from the February 2022 meeting. After full review and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve the minutes as presented.

## **Financial Report**

Marlo presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. As of April 30, the report showed year-to-date revenue at \$573,085, calculating year-over-year growth for the fiscal year at more than \$114,000.

Claims dockets for the months of February and March 2022 were also presented. All expenditures were provided in full detail by line item and were budgeted expenses.

Reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through March 31, 2022 were presented, showing a total balance of \$1,922,438.91. Included on the report were details of each account with financial institution, current interest rates, and maturity dates listed. All accounts have been reconciled by accountants at McArthur, Slay, & Dews, PLLC.

Dorsey also presented a six-month budget overview for FY2022. The board reviewed each line item of the budget, which was created projecting a 15% reduction in income for the fiscal year. After review, income is currently at 73% of the annual projection six months into the fiscal year, with a net income of \$120,771.39 to-date. With higher than budgeted income, the board discussed ways to increase certain budget categories for the remaining months of the fiscal year.

After a full review and upon a motion made by Anthony Harris and duly seconded by Dr. Joe Paul, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial report as presented.

## **Old Business**

Marlo presented the two overall growth strategies from VisitHattiesburg's strategic plan, which was developed by Young Strategies in late 2019 to position Hattiesburg as a year-round, outdoor visitor destination. Several key areas will remain the focus as recovery efforts for Hattiesburg continue from the pandemic. Following additional board discussion, Dorsey announced that the Mississippi legislature extended the organization's special tax levy legislation through 2027.

In addition, House Bill 453 passed the state legislature, creating \$30 million in ARPA funding for round two of the Tourism Recovery Fund. Of this, Hattiesburg expects to receive approximately \$1,825,000. A tentative marketing and advertising budget for this money was presented to the board. These funds must be allocated by 2024 and spent by 2026, with Hattiesburg's plans to spend a majority of funding in the first two years for maximum return on investment.

After review and continued discussion of round two of recovery funding, Bonnie Warren made a motion to authorize Marlo to sign relevant documentation necessary at the state level to move forward with the collection of funds. Seconded by Melanie Archer, the board unanimously approved the motion.

## **New Business**

In November 2021, the board approved funding to officially launch Mississippi's first GeoTour. Development of the program is in the works, and VisitHattiesburg will serve as the fiscal agent of the project. Project partner Hub City Cachers will manage the physical caches, and counsel David Ott presented a cooperative agreement for the partnership. After full discussion, Michael Marks made a motion to enter the agreement.

Seconded by Shawn Lowrey, the motion was unanimously approved by the board.

Marlo provided a year-over-year overview of tax revenue, showing hotel collections up 64.8% for the year while restaurant collections are 29.97% higher than the previous year. She also provided an update on recent and upcoming group events in Hattiesburg and details on how VisitHattiesburg celebrated Global Meetings Industry Day.

Dorsey presented media and public relations updates, overviewing recent engagement of travel writers, tradeshow, and media articles featuring Hattiesburg. An analytic and visitor intelligence report was also presented, providing strategic results to determine best tactics for future return on investment.

Dr. Joe Paul exited the meeting at 12:45 p.m due to a scheduled appointment out of town. Quorum was still met to continue the meeting.

Marlo presented a marketing budget update. Because Tourism Recovery Funding won't be received until late summer, Dorsey suggests continued investment in marketing with FY2022 funds so as to not lose momentum in the rapid growth Hattiesburg has seen from current marketing campaigns. After full review, Anthony Harris made a motion to amend the FY2022 budget by increasing the marketing line item by \$165,500 for the final six months of the fiscal year. Seconded by Bonnie Warren, the board unanimously approved the motion.

Kristen presented a Programs & Promotions update, beginning with Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art's recent and upcoming projects, including round three of the Hattiesburg Utility Box Project and the unveiling of "The Hattiesbirds" in Midtown Hattiesburg and "We are the Future" near Downtown Hattiesburg.

A list of 2022 Mississippi Miss Hospitality contestants was presented, with the program scheduled for July 10-16, 2022.

Also presented was a list of FY22 Tourism Grant Program recipients and additional requests. Because a large number of events are returning for the first time since the pandemic with an increased need for funding, VisitHattiesburg has received a record number of qualified grant candidates. The board was asked to review and consider another increase for the remaining months of the fiscal year during the February board meeting. After full review and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to increase the FY2022 TGP budget to \$50,000.

The board then reviewed current assets, including operational reserves of the organization. To continue VisitHattiesburg's strategic planning implementation, the board discussed specific ways to best invest funds. The board agreed to continue discussion at its next scheduled meeting.

### **Executive Session**

Upon motion by Michael Marks, seconded by Melanie Archer, there was discussion to consider entering Executive Session for the purpose of discussing real estate negotiations. Following unanimous favorable vote, the board entered Executive Session with all meeting members remaining present.

During Executive Session, the board reviewed real estate options for a future Hattiesburg Visitors Center. Following full discussion and upon a motion made by Michael Marks and duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was unanimous favorable vote to exit Executive Session.

Being no other business, and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Michael Marks, the meeting was adjourned at 1:29 p.m.

**Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:**

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Frank James, Board Chair

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Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director